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PREPARED AND PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF TUSKALOOSA PRESBYTERY.

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RICHMOND, VA.:

PRESBYTERIAN COMMITTEE OF PUBLICATION.

1894.

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1894.

PRINTED BY
WHITTET & SHEPPERSON,
RICHMOND, VA.

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EDUCATION OF THE MINISTRY.

THE subject of this paper is almost constantly under discussion in the religious press, in the pulpit, and in the judicatories of the church, and the various aspects of it have been so fully and frequently presented that, though there is little hope of throwing new light upon it, the intrinsic importance of the subject is such that the continued discussion of it is necessarily valuable in a practical way, and there always remains the hope of stimulating our people to the maintenance of the high standard hitherto attained by us, and to an increasing effort to render our ministers more efficient in preaching the gospel of Christ to a lost world.

It seems peculiarly unfortunate that, in such an age as this, the proposal to lower the standard for the education of the ministry should ever have been seriously entertained. In every profession in life knowledge is increasing and greater pro-

ficiency is required in those who succeed. Certainly there is no reason for supposing that weaker men, and men of fewer acquirements, are demanded in the pulpit. On the contrary, this increase of knowledge is an imperial consideration why our church should elevate her standard for the education of the ministry, and refuse to send forth any except "workmen who need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim. ii. 15.) With this view of the subject, the writer does not propose to enter upon any defence of our system of education or of the requirements of our book for ordination. In his judgment they need no defence, but they do need to be more conscientiously and thoroughly carried out by the students themselves, by the Presbyteries, and by the church at large. He will, therefore, content himself here with a practical consideration of the subject, and with a discussion mainly of some of those matters which have given rise to not a little dissatisfaction and adverse criticism.

I. Let us give attention first to the DUTY OF THE CANDIDATE FOR THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.

1. A scriptural qualification, much insisted on by the Apostle Paul, is that a minister shall be "*apt to teach.*" (1 Tim. iii. 2; 2 Tim. ii. 2, 24.)

This, of course, means that he shall be furnished with the knowledge and the skill necessary to make him a capable instructor of others in divine things. He is essentially a teacher. The Master sends him forth with that commission, "Go ye therefore, and *teach* all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: *teaching* them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.) It is impossible for a man who has not first learned himself to become a capable teacher of others. What an anomaly to ordain and commission men who are totally unprepared to preach and teach the gospel to the people? Men are not supposed to practice medicine or law who have never learned those sciences, but there are those who think that a man ought to be commissioned to preach, if he desires to, whether he has had any special preparation for it or not. There are others who, while not ignoring preparation entirely, seem to think that if the preparation be more or less superficial, the preacher is all the better for the superficiality. Our church, however, has always contended for the principle, and practiced it in the ordination of her ministers, that every preacher of the gospel should be provided with the best preparation

possible. This is in line with scriptural teaching, and especially with the instructions given by the Apostle Paul in the pastoral epistles: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Tim. ii. 15.) Every candidate for the ministry ought to be a devout, conscientious, diligent student. His course should be far-reaching and thorough; broad and deep; a course that requires for its mastery, not only time, but also hard, painstaking, mental labor. It should be a course that so thoroughly equips him for his work that he "need not be ashamed" to preach the gospel in any community or before any assemblage of the people.

It will not do to say in opposition to this that the apostles of our Lord were "unlearned and ignorant men" (Acts iv. 13), and use this as an argument against special preparation for the ministry at the present time. They could be called "unlearned and ignorant men" only in the rabbinic or pharisaic use of these terms. They had not sat in the rabbinical school, but "they had been with Jesus." Before they began regular preaching, they had really enjoyed the best advantages and the most careful preparation under the immediate tuition of our Lord himself; and

beyond that, they were *inspired* men, who were equipped with extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, one of which was the power to speak in other tongues. Even the Apostle Paul, a scholarly man before his conversion, subjected himself to a three years' special preparation in Arabia (Gal. i. 17, 18) before he entered upon the full work of the gospel ministry. Is it conceivable that he or any of Christ's apostles were ashamed, because of ignorance, to appear before any audience, from the polished and critical concourse of Athens or Corinth to the poor inhabitants of the Ghetto in Rome, or the wandering Arabs of the desert? Assuredly not. They preached the gospel wherever the opportunity presented itself, and they were thoroughly equipped to present it with efficacy and power.

An important function of the preacher's office is to "rightly divide the word of truth"; that is, to handle it in such an intelligent and forcible way as to bring about those results which it is designed to produce. The cause of Christ has suffered much from unskilful handling of "the word of truth." Peter tells us that in Paul's epistles "are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own

destruction." (2 Peter iii. 16.) The candidate for the ministry who does not wish to fall into this category should conscientiously endeavor to make the most of his opportunities during the period of preparation. It is useless to talk about the public servant of Christ being an apt teacher if he be not an apt student; or about his "rightly dividing the word of truth" if he has not submit ted himself to rigorous mental discipline, and if he be not able to understand "the word of truth" himself. I remember to have heard a young, self-constituted evangelist stand up before a large assemblage of people and begin his address by saying that he had never studied theology, and did not want to study it; that he did not know anything about it, and did not want to know anything about it; and that he wished he could forget what he did know; and then he presumptuously attempted a series of definitions of various theological terms, such as regeneration, justification, sanctification, etc.; offering them, of course, in lieu of the grand definitions of these terms which have been wrought out by the combined wisdom of devout theologians throughout the past ages of the church. When he had concluded I remarked to a gentleman near me, that the speaker's introductory remarks in regard to his

ignorance of theology were entirely unnecessary, since that must have become sufficiently apparent to any one who was informed upon the subject, before he had proceeded far in his discourse. A man who despises preparation for the work of the gospel ministry is, in my judgment, unfit to stand in the pulpit as a public teacher of the people in divine things. "Thou therefore which teachest another," says the apostle, "teachest thou not thyself?" (Rom. ii. 21.) Of no man except the divine Master himself could it have been said, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" (John vii. 15.) And this inference was incorrect. Our Lord appears to have been a diligent student of the Holy Scriptures, the principal literature of the Jewish people; but the Pharisees thought that, because he had not been known as a member of the rabbinical schools of Jerusalem, he "had never learned." In consequence of the divine nature in union with the human in the constitution of his person, the learning of the schools was unnecessary for him; but any mere man who aspires to the sacred office ought to give himself diligently to the cultivation of his mind and to the acquisition of useful knowledge of all kinds.

2. The candidate for the ministry also has

need of much *patience* during the period of preparation. There is a disposition among students and many others to imagine that the time spent in preparation is lost. Not so. No time spent in careful, judicious preparation is lost. On the contrary, it is precious time when well employed. I seriously question the wisdom of the effort to shorten our course of study. Ordinarily the man even of mature years, who will take the time to go through a systematic course of training before entering upon the work of the ministry, will do the most efficient service afterwards, even though the period of active labor allowed him be comparatively brief. It would be an advantage to a man of forty years of age, who is called to the ministry, to give from three to five years of the twenty-five or thirty that remain to him to special preparation. The time would be admirably employed, and his work in the gospel would be all the better for it. Those students who become impatient at the length of the course, and cut off both ends of the scholastic year by absence, and then, perhaps, enter upon the full work of the ministry before the course is completed, act very unwisely. The hours devoted to the class-room are golden hours, which should be avariciously hoarded and conscientiously expended. When

students imagine that the exigencies of the work are so great as to demand that they shall enter the ministry half-prepared, they are misled by a "zeal not according to knowledge." The exigencies of the work are no greater now than they have always been. The world was lying in sin when our blessed Master came in the flesh, and yet he passed through what may be called a long period of preparation, patiently waiting till "the fulness of time" was come, before he began preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Many a man rushes into the ministry of the gospel before "the fulness of his time" has come. The period of preparation is just as important, and should be just as sacredly fulfilled, as the period of active service; and the reader's observation will bear me out in saying that those who are most faithful in the former are usually most faithful in the latter.

3. The candidate for the ministry also has need of *self-denial.* He cannot afford to give the reign to selfish indulgence. That unfits him for the hard mental work of the student. Mental training, like physical training, requires that the body be kept under and brought into subjection. But aside from this, if the candidate is receiving aid from the church, there is another

reason for self-denial. He ought to use the means which God's people put into his hands conscientiously, and only to supply the necessities and ordinary comforts of student life. We cannot disguise the fact that the course of some beneficiary students in this regard has given just cause for criticism. Owing to the unwise expenditure of money by some, the impression is becoming more and more widely prevalent that unworthy men frequently receive aid from the church. While there is some ground for this impression, yet it is not believed that the evil complained of prevails to any large extent. The overwhelming majority of those receiving aid are without doubt self-sacrificing, devoted, consecrated men. But the very fact that a few use the funds of the church unwisely, not to say prodigally, is sufficient cause for dissatisfaction and criticism. No beneficiary student should permit himself to become the subject of criticism in this matter. The money contributed by the church is not intended to provide the recipient with little selfish indulgences, but with a reasonable sustenance, while pursuing his course. Here is the place for the exercise of self-denial in the use of the money of the church, and it lies largely with the students to allay dissatisfac-

tion and disarm criticism by their conduct in this matter. It has been observed that some beneficiary students are not as economical in their expenditures as other students who sustain themselves. Of course the man who uses the church money more freely than he would his own is a fair mark for criticism, and until our students, without exception, come to realize this we cannot avoid dissatisfaction among those who are familiar with the facts.

II. But let us turn next and consider THE DUTY OF THE PRESBYTERY TO CANDIDATES FOR THE MINISTRY.

1. The first duty of the Presbytery is to *receive candidates for the ministry under its care.* The significance of this action is not sufficiently emphasized. It is often done too hurriedly. Attention has recently been directed to the fact in the religious papers that Presbyteries are not infrequently called together in special session for no other purpose than to receive candidates for the ministry under their care. It might be argued that a special meeting of Presbytery for this purpose alone would tend to emphasize the importance which our church attaches to the reception of candidates. But it is well known that called meetings of Presbytery are ordinarily attended by

a bare quorum, three ministers and one ruling elder, that these brethren snatch the time from other pressing duties, and are in a hurry to finish the business on hand. The candidate is hastily examined upon experimental religion and upon his motives for seeking the gospel ministry, and whatever representations are made in his behalf are accepted without question. The next thing in order, in the great majority of cases, is to make application through the Presbytery to the Executive Committee of Education for pecuniary assistance for the candidate while in the prosecution of his studies. Now no objection is offered to this order of procedure after the Presbytery is assembled, nor to the application for aid in all needful cases. I would discourage no worthy man from putting himself under care of Presbytery, nor from applying for aid if he needs it. But it appears to me that it is rarely necessary to call a special meeting of Presbytery for this purpose. The matter is too important to be disposed of in the perfunctory way that is usual at called meetings. The candidate should come before Presbytery at stated meetings when the members are all present; he should be patiently and thoroughly examined; his application for aid should be carefully weighed and considered; and

if found worthy and in need of assistance he should be heartily commended to the Executive Committee of Education. The appropriations when made are often not sufficient for the candidates who are really in need of assistance, and yet, such as they are, they are sometimes given to those who subsequently prove to be unworthy. To guard against the latter it would be perfectly just and right in Presbytery to take a written obligation from every candidate receiving aid, requiring him, in case he abandoned his purpose to enter the ministry either before or after the completion of his studies, to refund to Presbytery, within a stipulated time, all the money received by him. No true man would object to signing such an obligation, and certainly Presbytery should be more careful in the matter. Hundreds of dollars are donated by the church every year to students who never enter the ministry. They are not necessarily untrue men, but they were mistaken, and entered upon the course in all honesty, without having well considered the matter of a call. Under such circumstances, it is better to discontinue the course and abandon one's purpose, rather than to enter upon the work of the ministry without the profound conviction that one has been called by God to it. Neverthe-

less, the money is gone, and Presbytery is in some measure to blame. The responsibility rests there and it cannot be shifted. The church at large looks to the presbyteries to protect its honor, to wisely distribute its offerings, and to furnish it with a competent and efficient ministry.

2. But the duty of Presbytery does not end with receiving candidates for the ministry under its care and with making appropriations for their assistance while prosecuting their studies. It has then only begun. The candidates are really *under care*, and Presbytery should keep itself informed as to how they are conducting themselves and progressing in their work. It would be a wise, precautionary measure for Presbytery to require all of its candidates to report in writing, at least once a year, to the Presbyterial Committee of Education, and direct that committee to lay the substance of these reports before the body. This should be done in order that Presbytery may be kept continually informed as to the real condition of all of its candidates. Candidates have been known to remain under care of Presbytery for years, from whom no direct report whatever would be received. Without yearly reports it is impossible for Presbytery to know what its candidates are doing, and whether

or not they are making good use of their time and the money appropriated for their assistance.

3. There is a prevailing tendency, too, for Presbyterial *examinations* for *licensure* and *ordination to degenerate* into *formality*. This tendency cannot be too sedulously resisted. The Presbytery cannot delegate this duty to any one else, but must bear the responsibility of the examinations which are necessary to determine whether a candidate is possessed of the qualifications essential to the work of the gospel ministry. Paul says to Timothy, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." (2 Tim. ii. 2.) The Presbytery is charged with the duty of seeing that the men who are put in trust with the gospel are both faithful and capable, that is to say, they must be men of character, faithful to truth and duty, and men of such knowledge and other useful acquirements as shall fit them for instructing those who sit under their ministry. The Presbytery has no authority or right to commit the gospel to men of any other type. Weak and ignorant men should not be licensed or ordained to preach; and even men of character and acquirements, who have no aptness to

teach, should be rejected. It is the duty of Presbytery, by thorough and searching examination, to find out the character and the qualifications of the men whom they commission to preach the gospel. To the furtherance of this end, the examining committees of Presbytery should be directed to prepare themselves for the work entrusted to them. The examination is frequently conducted in a lax and unsatisfactory manner, because those in charge of it are manifestly unprepared. They have given the subjects upon which they are to question the candidate no recent attention or thought; no method of procedure is fixed in their own minds; they are sometimes not as familiar with the subject as the candidate himself; and they go about it in an awkward, bungling way, embarrassing alike to themselves, to the candidate, and to the Presbytery. If it were understood that when committees on examination are appointed, they are expected to keep themselves posted on the subjects allotted to them and ready at any time to thoroughly test a candidate's knowledge of those subjects, the results obtained by our Presbyterial examinations would be more satisfactory.

4. "Lay hands suddenly on *no* man." (1 Tim.

v. 22.) That scriptural rule is without exceptions. Not even if a man with the eloquence of Whitefield were to appear among us, have we the right to ordain him to the ministry without submitting him to the test of thorough examination, in order to ascertain his character and other qualifications. Eloquence is not a prescribed scriptural qualification for the preacher, but faithfulness of character and ability to teach are prescribed scriptural qualifications; and it is quite possible that an eloquent man might want to preach very much, and yet be unfit for it. Paul says, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." (1 Cor. xiii. 1.) No man should be ordained to the gospel ministry with whose qualifications the Presbytery is not well acquainted, and the Presbytery cannot become well acquainted with any man's qualifications without careful and thorough examination.

5. Paul also says, "*Not a novice*, lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." (1 Tim. iii. 6.) By "a novice" he means, as the marginal reading informs us, "one newly come to the faith." It very frequently happens that men recently converted want

to begin preaching immediately, and there are those who think that such men should be authoritatively commissioned as ministers of the word. But the apostle says that such a man is "a novice," and should not be entrusted with the sacred office for his own sake, "lest, being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil." It is a just inference also that he is entirely unfitted for the work. How can he who has but newly come to the faith teach others anything beyond the mere elements of divine truth? And that much, at least, every child of God has the privilege of doing without entering upon the official ministry of the word. It is the duty of Presbytery to decline to license or ordain to the ministry a mere "novice," whatever his apparent qualifications may be. The fact that he is "a novice" is sufficient reason for not putting him in trust with the gospel.

III. But let us consider now THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH AT LARGE IN THIS MATTER.

1. The first duty of the church is *prayer*. The Master says, "The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." (Luke x. 2.) This, of course, means that God is willing to answer such prayers

and to increase the supply of ministers. If the people want God to send them pastors and spiritual teachers, let them ask him to do so. His ear is open to such petitions. When, therefore, true and faithful preachers of the gospel become scarce, it indicates a prayerless condition of the church. Prayer is the gauge by which to determine ministerial supply.

But the people of God should also be in sympathy with the candidates for the ministry, and pray for them. No class of persons need sympathy and prayer more, or appreciate them more highly. These servants of Christ pass through many trying experiences; their path is often a hard one, and their sufferings great; and they ought to have the love and the prayers of all true Christians, who bear the interests of the Saviour's kingdom on their hearts. But is it not true that the "young theologue," as he is contemptuously called, enjoys very little of either the sympathy or the prayers of the masses of Christian people? Is it not true that some, instead of encouraging him, throw every possible obstacle in his way? And is there not a disposition among many, and especially of his young companions in the church, to make themselves merry at his expense? Unnatural as it may seem, there is enough of the spirit here

described rife in the church to make the candidate for the ministry sometimes feel that there is little sympathy or love for him among God's people.

2. Again, it is the duty of the church to give to all her needy candidates for the ministry *generous financial assistance.* Just for the reason that she insists upon a long and severe course of study, followed by rigid examinations, she should be generous in her support of those who must of necessity go through with it. In the great majority of cases God calls the sons of the poor, or of parents of moderate means, into the ministry of his Son. The wisdom of this is apparent. They are already inured to the strict economy and hardship which most ministers have to endure throughout life. But these young men have a hard time getting through this course of education. It is difficult for a man to be faithful to his studies when he is constantly perplexed to know how to secure money enough to pay his way and to supply himself with a few necessary articles of clothing. It may be suggested that he could borrow the money to complete his education, and refund it after he was through. Aside from the serious disadvantage to our young ministers of entering upon their life-work burdened with

debt, it must be remembered that five out of six of them receive much less than one thousand dollars a year all their lives, and it would be a difficult financial problem to pay an accumulated debt out of such a limited income, which, it is to be feared, many would fail to solve. Our people should be more generous to the cause of ministerial education; and if the Presbyteries are faithful to their duty in receiving and licensing candidates, the church will not be imposed upon by unworthy men.

3. Once more, it is the duty of God's people *to resist the present tendency to the secularization of the ministry.* The preaching and teaching elements in the ministerial office are being largely discounted in the present day. It is the desire of many to be entertained in God's house by fanciful music and a ritualistic service, and they are barely willing to tolerate a brief little sermon sandwiched between other exercises. This feeling is spreading to an alarming extent, and is defended on the ground that music and responsive readings are in the nature of worship, whereas the preaching of the word is not—a position wholly unsound and untenable. God is as much worshiped and glorified in the devout exposition of his revealed will and in the appli-

cation of it to the hearts and consciences of the people as in any other part of the service. As a consequence of the feeling alluded to, the preacher is not valued so much for his ability to preach the gospel with power and instruct the people in divine truth as for his ability "to run a church." By "running a church" is meant making it a great financial and social success. The church becomes a grand social organization, with very little of spiritual life or power of testimony in it. In this materialistic, pleasure-loving age, the preacher must become more and more "a man of affairs," and there are many preachers who of necessity, as it were, reversing the order of the apostles (Acts vi. 4), have practically forsaken the ministry of the word "to serve tables." These demands necessarily materialize mind and heart, and limit the preacher's time for study, and his attainments in those departments in which he should excel. His mind becomes a mere warehouse, filled with all kinds of stores, and he is unable to acquire or maintain spiritual power in dispensing the word. Indeed, spiritual power is not desired, but "drawing power" is, and the ability to see the greatest number of people in the smallest possible time. Many people do not go to God's house in obedience

to God's command and for the purpose of cultivating their spiritual life in the knowledge of divine things, but they go when they find it convenient, pleasant, and entertaining. Of course no moral obligation rests upon them; that all lies at the preacher's door. He is made the pack-horse for the whole congregation, and must draw and hold them together by his eloquence, his personal "magnetism," or some other occult endowment which ensures success. "Business ministers," are at a premium, spiritual ministers at a discount. Those spiritual gifts which should rank first in the qualifications for the sacred office are relegated to the second place, and the practical business gifts which should be secondary are promoted to the first place. Many churches now want a preacher who, in the ugly colloquial phrase of the day, "means business." The cry of the age is the cry of Iago, "Go to, make all the money thou canst; put money in thy purse," and many churches are disposed to echo this cry. The effort to "build up a church" is often apparently to make it a strong, vigorous, financial and social institution—in other words, a success—but with very little thought of making it efficient in sending the gospel to the heathen or to the destitute in our own land.

It is the duty of God's people to resist this tendency to secularize the ministry. It is entirely contrary to the scriptural conception of the church of God and of the sacred office. We are in danger of forgetting the teaching of the Master, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John xviii. 36), and "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation" (Luke xvii. 20.) It is the duty of church officers to attend to the secular affairs of the church; it is the duty of the minister "to give himself continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (Acts vi. 4.) Paul says to Timothy, "Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed to thyself and to the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." (1 Tim. iv, 15, 16.) It is the duty of God's people to demand spiritual teachers, and to stifle the cry for men who draw to themselves and the church, but not to Christ. Candidates for the ministry are tempted to meet the demands of the people, and to preach what the people wish to hear rather than what the Lord has commanded them to preach. The people employ the minister, and they think he ought to suit; and he is constantly tempted to comply with their desires, regardless

of his divine commission. But this is not the scriptural conception of his work. His first duty should be to please the Master who sent him, rather than the people who call him. "To his own Master he standeth or falleth." If he is not faithful to God and his word, he cannot be faithful to the people. Hence the exhortation of the apostle, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." (Heb. xiii. 17.)